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A METHODOLOGICAL HYPOTHESIS FOR THE PLIGHT OF THE HUMANITIES.

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ALTHOUGH THE HUMANITIES ARE EXPERIENCING IN THIS COUNTRY AN UNPRECEDENTED EXPANSION AND INCREASE IN NUMBER OF DEGREES GRANTED AND IN FINANCIAL SUPPORT, THEY HAVE SUFFERED A RELATIVE DECLINE IN STUDENT ENROLLMENT, FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND STUDENT QUALITY WHEN COMPARED TO OTHER AREAS OF STUDY. THIS PLIGHT OF THE HUMANITIES STEMS FROM A "METHODOLOGICAL GAP" BETWEEN THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE HUMANITIES AND THE GOALS OF THE HUMANITIES, I.E., THE GOALS ARE FREQUENTLY DISCUSSED, BUT THERE IS NO OBJECTIVE GUIDE TO ACHIEVING THEM. BECAUSE OF THIS GAP, RESEARCH IN THE HUMANITIES IS SELDOM CUMULATIVE AND OFTEN LACKS PURPOSE AND DIRECTION. A FINAL SERIOUS IMPLICATION IS THAT WITH THE GREAT INCREASE IN TECHNOLOGY, THE HUMANITIES TODAY TELL US LESS ABOUT MAN'S TOTAL CULTURE THAN THEY USED TO. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE "AAUP BULLETIN," VOLUME 54, NUMBER 1, MARCH 1968, PAGES 78-84. (BN)

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A Methodological Hypothesis for the Plight of the Humanities

By W. DAVID MAXWELL

This article constructs an hypothesis for the plight of the humanities. It should be stressed that it does no more than this. While alternative hypotheses are criticized there is no formal empirical attempt to demonstrate that this hypothesis is correct or is supported by more evidence than alternatives. This hypothesis, however, has such important ramifications that it must be entertained when considering the plight of the humanities.

Let us consider initially the dimensions of the plight. A distinguished group of scholars, in a special report prepared for university alumni magazines in 1965,[1] defined the humanities as consisting of the subjects embraced by history, languages, literature, the arts, philosophy, and the history and comparison of law and religion. These, the report says, constitute the soul of our culture and, "Amidst great material well-being, our culture stands in danger of losing its very soul." What is occurring, says this report, is ". . . an evident disregard, or at best a deep devaluation, of the things that refine and dignify and give meaning and heart to our humanity . . . the state of the humanities today creates a crisis for national leadership." Other parts of the report refer to "the present predicament" of the humanities, to the "death of the liberal arts tradition," to the possibility, if support is secured, that the humanities may "regain strength in this country." It is thus fair to say that the Special Report pictures the humanities as a dying area in desperate need of resuscitation, in sharp contrast to the natural sciences.[2]

The Special Report for alumni magazines was based in large part upon the *Report of the Commission on the Humanities*—a series of statements on the humanities by scholars in many areas of study from all over the United States.[3] While not all the humanists represented view the humanities as dying, support for this view can be readily found therein. Thus the statement of the Association for Asian Studies puts it bluntly by saying that ". . . the humanities in the age of super-science and super-technology have an increasingly difficult struggle for existence."[4] Perhaps the most impassioned plea of all is that of the American Historical Association which includes such statements as "Today, more than ever, those concerns which nourish personality, and are at the heart of individual freedom, are being neglected in our free society. Those studies which refine the values and feed the very soul of a culture are increasingly starved of support."[5]

Such statements should be quickly disavowed as accurate descriptions of the dimensions of the plight of the humanities. Absolutes should not be confused with relatives. There is no earlier golden age in this country in which there was a greater total of resources devoted to the humanities or a greater expenditure of resources per capita on the humanities. It is a failing of all of us as historians that we characterize the peoples of earlier times in terms of that

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[1] Editorial Projects for Education, Inc., "The Plight of the Humanities (1965, n.p.).

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[2] *Ibid.*

[3] The Commission on the Humanities, *Report of the Commission on the Humanities* (New York: The American Council of Learned Societies, 1964).

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

minute portion of them who left a record of their existence.

Considerable support for the contention that the humanities are *not* dying may also be found in the *Report of the Commission on the Humanities.* The American Society for Aesthetics notes in the opening sentence of its statement that "There has been a remarkable growth of interest in the arts in this country since World War I."[6] In speaking of the "revival" of aesthetics, the statement also notes that "Forty years ago only a few colleges offered courses in aesthetics. Today nearly every liberal arts program includes such courses."[7] The Modern Language Association labels, as "still valid today" a statement of fifteen years earlier that:

> Outside of France today for French letters, outside of Germany for German letters, outside of Spain for Spanish letters, the most abundant and the best work on those foreign literatures is being done in our century in the United States of America.[8]

Similarly, the Linguistic Society of America characterizes linguistic scholarship in the United States as ". . . active, lively, vigorous, with exciting research being carried on in many different areas," and refers to the "explosive growth" of linguistics during the past three or four decades.[9] The Metaphysical Society of America refers to the increasing demand for scholars and teachers of philosophy, the increase in the number of departments of philosophy, and the "explosive production of articles, essays, monographs, and anthologies," while deploring the fact that book-length studies have not kept pace.[10] The American Philosophical Association notes that "the relative emphasis upon philosophy in American education has increased sharply since World War II"[11] and expects teaching demands to ". . . increase enormously in the years immediately to come."[12]

And so it goes. The American Musicological Society characterizes the current state of musicology in this country as "flourishing" and is of the opinion that "in current productivity and quality, American musicology stands second only to that of Germany, if second to that of any country."[13] The American Philological Association refers to "American leadership in Classics," notes that in many colleges enrollment in Latin and Greek is rising more rapidly than college enrollments *in toto,* and concludes that ". . . there are numerically, and perhaps proportionally, more students studying Latin at the lowest levels than ever before," even though the "place" of Classics in the American educational scene is perhaps "lower" than it once was.[14] Finally, the American Historical Association, despite its plaints that history is "too little honored," "too much taken for granted, or vulgarized, or abused," and its values ". . . for our conduct and character . . . consistently underestimated," also notes that ". . . history and English literature are the two most powerful major studies in many of our leading universities and colleges—and the prime elective studies, too."[15]

What, then, has actually happened to the humanities in this country? What is the nature of the plight? To perceive more accurately the dimensions of the problem, let us place it in the context of education as a whole. In his exhaustive study, *The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States,* Professor Fritz Machlup notes that, in 1870, only 57 per cent of the children between the ages of 5 and 17 were in school. By 1900, this proportion had risen to 79 per cent and in 1960 it was 96 per cent. In 1870, less than 2 per cent of those between the ages of 18 and 21 were attending institutions of higher learning. By 1900, this percentage had risen to 4 per cent and in 1960 it was 33½ per cent. In 1870, there were a little over 9000 bachelor's degrees awarded. By 1900, this number had tripled and by 1960 it had increased more than fortyfold. There was one doctor's degree awarded in 1870, 382 in 1900, and 9700 in 1960. There has clearly been in this country during the last century an unprecedented growth in education.[16]

To what extent have the humanities participated in this growth? Dael Wolfle, in his *America's Resources of Specialized Talent,* found that, of those reaching 22 years of age during the 10-year period 1901-1910, 6 per thousand received a bachelor's or first professional degree in the humanities (including history). In the period 1951-53, this ratio had increased almost fourfold, rising to 23 per thousand. History itself increased fivefold, as did the natural sciences, the latter rising from 3 per thousand persons reaching age 22 to 15. Thus, early in this century, 1 person in every 168 of appropriate age received a degree in the humanities. At mid-century this was true of one in every 43.[17]

Thus, far from dying, the humanities have expanded greatly in recent years. In the three-year

[6] *Ibid.,* p. 51.
[7] *Ibid.,* p. 53.
[8] *Ibid.,* p. 129, quoting Henri Peyre, "American Scholarship in the Field of Foreign Literatures," *P.M.L.A.,* March, 1949, p. 25.
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 152.
[10] *Ibid.,* pp. 160-161.
[11] *Ibid.,* p. 195.
[12] *Ibid.,* p. 193.
[13] *Ibid.,* p. 166.
[14] *Ibid.,* pp. 183-187.
[15] *Ibid.,* p. 114.
[16] Fritz Machlup, *The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 61-91.
[17] Dael Wolfle, *America's Resources of Specialized Talent* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 31.

period 1951-1953, one and one-half times as many doctor's degrees were awarded in the humanities (including history) as in *all* fields of knowledge during the five year period 1911-1915.[18] This expansion in the humanities, however, has been accompanied by even greater expansion in other areas of knowledge, so that (and we come finally to the nature of the plight) the humanities have suffered a *relative* decline (in the same sense that my income falls relative to that of my neighbor's because his rises more rapidly than mine). In the period 1901-1910, for example, less than 1 person per thousand reaching age 22 had a bachelor's degree in the social sciences, whereas in 1951-53, 17 per thousand had this degree.[19] Both the humanities *and* the natural sciences suffered relative declines as such new areas as the social sciences grew more rapidly. In the period 1901-05, thirteen per cent of bachelor's or first professional degrees were in the natural sciences. In 1951-53, this had fallen to 10 per cent. The corresponding percentages for the humanities (including history) show a relative decline from 28 per cent to 15. Interestingly enough, despite the breast-beating of the American Historical Association, history itself did not suffer even a relative decline during this period, remaining constant at about three per cent. The social sciences during this period rose, relatively, from about two per cent to more than elevent per cent as a percentage of all bachelor's or first professional degrees.[20]

Almost the same changes in relative positions of the various fields are revealed in other of Wolfle's data showing the distribution of doctor's degrees by field. Comparing the periods 1911-15 and 1951-53, doctorates in the *natural* sciences fell as a percentage of all doctorates from more than 44 per cent to less than 37 per cent. The humanities (including history) fell from 33 per cent of all doctorates in the earlier period to 16 percent in the period 1951-53. Doctorates in the social sciences also fell slightly (from 10.6 per cent to 8 per cent) in relative importance between the two periods as even greater expansion occurred at the gradute level in still other areas.[21]

Thus, in the last half century or so, the humanities have experienced an expansion without precedent in their history in this country. This expansion has been exceeded, however, by the expansion of other areas of knowledge, so that the humanities have experienced a relative decline. Despite the tendency of humanists to blame their relative decline on the rise of the natural sciences, the latter have actually shared the same fate—though to a lesser extent. Expansion in such areas as engineering, business administration, the social sciences, journalism, education, etc., has led to a relative decline in the humanities as well as the natural sciences. As one dimension of the plight of the humanities, we can dismiss the contention that they are dying. In the garden of knowledge the flower of the humanities is growing as it has never grown before. One dimension of its plight, however, is that other flowers (which might be regarded by some as weeds) are growing more rapidly.

A second dimension of the plight of the humanities when voiced by the spokesmen for the various areas involved takes various forms, the most extreme of which again confuses absolutes with relatives. According to the American Historical Association, the humanities are "increasingly starved" of financial support. According to this same source, even the teaching of history is supported ". . . most inadequately by the foundations and hardly at all by any public authorities."[22] This is, of course, nonsense, as the magnitude of that portion of the current membership in the American Historical Association, comprised of history teachers from publicly supported institutions, would suggest. The humanities are not now receiving less financial support in this country than they received in some earlier golden age nor are they receiving less per capita. Society is not dividing a constant-size pie of resources between the humanities, on the one hand, and all other areas of knowledge on the other. The indisputable growth occurring in the humanities could hardly occur if they were being "increasingly starved" of support.

So again, this dimension of the plight is relative, not absolute. At least with respect to overt financial support for research and graduate study, such areas as the natural sciences have received in recent decades larger support, larger increases in support, and perhaps even a larger rate of increase of financial support than have the humanities. In recent years, ten per cent of government fellowships have gone to the humanities, and it was estimated that, in 1963, only about one per cent of federal aid to "scholarly work" was devoted to the humanities.[23] While undoubtedly receiving more financial support than they have ever received before, the humanities are also undoubtedly receiving a lesser relative share of all financial support to research endeavors. One old enough to make the comparison may certainly conclude that a dollar of his current income is now worth far less than it was in 1932, and he may also even conclude that his share of the national income

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 300-301.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 292.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 298.

[22] The Commission on the Humanities, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
[23] John L. Snell, "Advancing the Humanities," *Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1 (January, 1965), p. 12.

is less now than it was in 1932. But he may well have been closer to starvation in 1932. So it is with the financial support to research in the humanities.

Nonetheless, it is undoubtedly true that some areas of learning, including the humanities, have been less favored in recent decades—in terms of financial support for research—than have areas concerned with the natural sciences and technology. This financial favoritism, according to spokesmen for a wide range of the humanities, has led to an "imbalance" among areas of knowledge. The American Studies Association maintains that research in the humanities generally is "under-supported" and that this "imbalance" should be corrected.[24] The American Anthropological Association refers to the "present imbalance" in current financial support for anthropological research in the humanities.[25] The Metaphysical Society of America deplores and asks for correction of the "vast imbalance" in financial support to scientific versus humanistic research.[26] The Renaissance Society of America maintains that the "absence" of federal support for the humanities "creates an imbalance at the universities and in other connections."[27] And the American Historical Association says that our whole civilization is becoming "increasingly unbalanced," largely because of the disproportionately small federal support of the humanities.[28]

Despite the frequent use of the term "imbalance" by spokesmen for the humanities, none has thought it necessary to define what would constitute a balance, or to indicate any point in time at which such a balance existed. Even more noteworthy is the unquestioning acceptance in many of the statements of the humanists of the implicit thesis that if there had been a balance in financial support during the period in which the imbalance occurred, the relative position of the humanities would have remained unchanged.

Thus far, two dimensions of the plight of the humanities have been considered—greater relative growth in other areas of learning (or lesser relative declines) and greater growth in financial support for research in some other areas than in the humanities. We could quickly add to the list statements indicating inadequate financial support for publications, curriculum development, teaching aids, library facilities, etc., but perhaps the third major dimension of the plight is that the humanities have not maintained their relative share of the ablest students. While there is not a great deal of evidence available on this point, there is some evidence that, at the undergraduate and graduate levels, there is a somewhat higher proportion of able students in the natural sciences than in the humanities.[29]

While the evidence is really not conclusive, there is no doubt that humanists themselves are convinced. There is also remarkably little hesistance, on the part of humanists, to attribute the differential to differential financial support. As the historians put it, ". . . the ablest young men and women—the potential humanists of the future—are being lured away (by the differential financial support)."[30] As one dean put it: "The bright student, as well as a white rat, knows a reward when he sees one."[31] Again, the implication is inescapable. If financial support had been available on equal terms in all areas, there would have been no relative decline in student quality in the humanities.

The plight of the humanities is thus relative rather than absolute and three of its major aspects are a relative decline in students enrolled in the humanities, in financial support of research, and in student quality. The basic explanation put forward by the humanities for their relative decline is a relative decrease in financial support.

This explanation, however, is far from being obviously correct. First of all, it implies a degree of economic determinism in the rates of growth of various areas of learning which even an economist finds difficult to accept. That the allocation of man's intellectual resources is governed in the same simple way by the price system as is the allocation of land among various uses is, at best, a statement lacking the same degree of support. Secondly (and relatedly), since the remedy for the plight of the humanities is unqualifiedly asserted by humanists to be greater financial support, we have to, if we accept their explanation, also accept an analysis in which there are—by analogy—no demand factors. The thesis, in other words, is that a certain distribution of financial support is somehow arrived at and this, having been established, yields that same distribution of education among fields of learning.

But this thesis is very difficult to accept. For one thing, the natural sciences—universally labeled as among the more favored financially—have (as we indicated) also experienced a relative decline, at least since the beginning of the present century. It would also be very difficult to establish that the differential rates of growth of various areas of learning are perfectly correlated with differential rates of growth of financial support since some base period. And even if this were the case it would be difficult

[24] The Commission on the Humanities, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 209.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

[29] Dael Wolfle, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-204.
[30] The Commission on the Humanities, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
[31] Educational Projects for Education, Inc., *op. cit.*

to distinguish causation from association so as to be able to say that the differential rates of financial support are the cause rather than the reflection of differential rates of growth.

Knowledge itself is open ended, giving to applications this same characteristic. Thus, a far simpler and more easily substantiated explanation for the relative decline of the humanities is that knowledge and applications of knowledge have expanded more rapidly in other areas, many of them at least in a formal sense entirely new. The relative decline of the humanities has not been due to neglect in any absolute sense or to the presence of hostile conspirators siphoning financial support from them to give to others. It is merely the purely mechanical result of the fact that other areas have grown more rapidly. But the simplicity of this explanation is more apparent than real, for it disguises the far more complex question of *why* knowledge has expanded more rapidly in many other areas than in the humanities.

This is the crucial question. In the attempt to answer it, we shall be preparing the ground for an hypothesis concerning the plight of the humanities. Let us approach this question by first asking, "What are the goals of the humanities?"

The goals of the humanities are to further our understanding ". . . of such enduring values as justice, freedom, virtue, beauty, and truth," to provide us with wisdom and the ability to make judgments, to provide us understanding of cultures other than our own, and for others an understanding of our own culture, to encourage creativity and concern for man's ultimate destiny, to produce better men,[32] "to give us a sense of man's innate worth and of his infinite capacities."[33] As put by the Commission on the Humanities,

> Included in the humanities are those studies that help man to find a purpose, that endow him with the ability to criticize intelligently and therefore to improve his own society, and that establish for the individual his sense of identity with other men both in his own country and in the world at large. Men and women who have a thoughtful appreciation of humane studies understand more fully than others the complexities with which we all live, and they have the potential for dealing with these complexities more rationally and more successfully. . . .[34]

Granted that these are the goals of the humanities, how—specifically—are they furthered by study of the humanities? *What is the nature of the link between the subject matter of the humanities and the goals they espouse?* I suggest that we do not know and that from the fact that we do not know stems, in large measure, the plight of the humanities.

Note that the *existence* of some connection between the humanities and the goals of the humanities is not being denied. It is not denied that studying Chaucer makes one wiser, or, to take a recent example, that a detailed knowledge of Bismarck's career would give our leaders an enhanced ability to make decisions of national policy.[35] Perhaps, as the author of the latter example maintains, the connection should be clear—but it is not. Surely it means little to say that wisdom and judgment are two of the goals of the humanities, unless these are in some sense specific thereto. It means little to say that we would make better decisions of national policy if we possessed a detailed knowledge of Bismarck's career, unless it is implied that this is more true of knowledge of such things as Bismarck's career than of other things. But the fact of the matter is that we know very little about why studying Chaucer makes us wise, or why it makes us wiser than studying some subject entirely outside the humanities. We cannot even compare the extent to which wisdom is furthered if we study various topics within the humanities. We do not know why or if decisions on national policy would be wiser if our leaders spent less time in studying currency reserve positions and more time on Bismark.

There is thus a methodological hiatus between the humanities and the goals of the humanities. We cannot objectively specify the subject matter which will further these goals because we cannot specify how it does so. We can only assert that it does.

Because of this methodological gap, research in the humanities often lacks purpose and direction. Since we do not know the process by which the goals of the humanities are furthered, we often cannot screen out those research efforts which make little or no contribution to this end from those that contribute significantly. For this same reason, there are often no set criteria with which to judge the method used in research or its results, so that much of the research in the humanities is not cumulative. To oversimplify, there is no one or no single group of even nominally neutral research techniques by means of which a researcher arrives at an interpretation of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" which is necessarily duplicative by other researchers. Thus there is no defined set of such interpretations, no objective criteria for determining which interpretation or interpretations add most to knowledge or which contribute most to the goals of the humanities. In other areas of knowledge it is more nearly true that research efforts can be objectively screened by a series of such questions as:

[32] The Commission on the Humanities, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 189.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[35] John L. Snell, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

What, specifically, is the problem? What research techniques are to be used, and why? Why is there a need for this research and how does it relate to what has been done by others? Similarly, the results of research in other areas of knowledge can often be evaluated more objectively than they can be in the humanities.

The methodological gap between the humanities and the goals of the humanities limits the ways in which curricula in the humanities can develop. As we have indicated, we cannot objectively specify the subject matter, mastery of which furthers these goals more than other subject matter, because we cannot specify the process by which it does so. As a result, given the goals of the humanities, we have no objective guide to curriculum or course content. Put another way, we have no objective guide, in terms of curriculum or course content, to what constitutes the soul of our culture and what does not. In this situation, what we have done, understandably enough, is to assume that the content of all courses in the humanities have something or other to do with furthering the goals of the humanities and thus the only permissible operation is that of subdivision. More important, the assumption is not only that the subject matter of the humanities furthers the goals of the humanities, but that the subject matter which does so is that of the humanities. Thus, curricula and course content are bounded by a line drawn arbitrarily because it could not be drawn any other way. If the humanities are the soul of our culture, presumably the soul does not change. While it is permissible to examine bits and pieces of this soul in greater detail, we cannot—consistent with this being the soul—introduce subject matter not already a part thereof.

We have thus a set of studies which we claim to constitute the soul of our culture. Since we have no principles of selection by which to justify the inclusion of a particular member of the set, we accept the set arbitrarily. Since the set is accepted arbitrarily, we cannot accept new members, because we have no rationale by means of which we could accept some while rejecting others and in terms of which the previous acceptance of present members could be shown as justifiable.

Thus, a part of our hypothesis for the plight of the humanities is that, because of the methodological gap between the humanities and the goals of the humanities, certain types of growth are precluded. The first aspect of the plight of the humanities—lesser relative growth—may well be attributable, at least in part, to an arbitrary circumscribing of what constitutes acceptable growth.

Similarly, this methodological gap may have much relevance for the second aspect of the plight of the humanities—the lesser growh of financial support for research. We have indicated that this methodological gap often prevents confrontation of research projects, research methods, and research results with the goals of the humanities. Research is thereby rendered less objective and less cumulative. *In terms of its own goals,* research in the humanities may well be less effective than in many other areas. So long as research projects in the humanities are not forced to pass such gauntlets as the question "How specifically will this project further the goals of the humanities?" society may be well advised to increase its research support to this area at a lower rate than to areas in which such confrontation is an inherent part of the process of research.

Comparison of the relative importance of the goals to be furthered by research is not alone sufficient to justify an allocation of research support. It is often pointed out by humanists that we need knowledge of how not to kill each other far more than we need further knowledge of how to slaughter one another. While this is undoubtedly true, it is also true that not only relative needs, but also relative ability to satisfy these needs, is relevant to any allocation of research support. While the goals of the humanities include goals more vital to us than any of those of the natural sciences, the inability of humanists to specify the process by which their goals are furthered makes rational an allocation of research support in which research efforts in the natural sciences take precedence. Thus, because of the methodological gap between the humanities and the goals of the humanities, that allocation of research support which maximizes society's welfare may well be one in which relatively lesser support is given to the humanities. Not only the relative importance of the goals but also the relative ability to further those goals must be considered.

Similarly, the third aspect of the plight of the humanities may well be attributable, at least in part, to the methodological gap between the humanities and their goals. Bright students will want to know how the study of the humanities furthers the goals which the humanities themselves stipulate. It is not a preference for training over education that leads students to ask such questions as "What am I supposed to get out of this course? How will knowledge of the subject matter of this course contribute to the broader goals stipulated by this area of knowledge?" These are basic questions of relevance *within* the framework of the humanities.[36]

[36] It is tempting to relegate all questions of relevance into the category of vocational relevance or the category of relevance to current issues. The first category can be summarily dismissed as inappropriate to the goals of the humanities. The second

It is at least as plausible to maintain that the relatively lesser ability of the humanities to answer such questions leads many able students to pursue other areas of knowledge as it is to blame this aspect of the problem upon differential financial suport. We should not too readily assume that students don't know what they are doing in arriving at a consensus of the relative merits of various areas of knowledge.[37]

Thus, our hypothesis for the plight of the humanities is that it stems from a missing methodological link between the humanities themselves and the goals which the humanities espouse. This hypothesis, in the terms in which we have developed it, contains a subhypothesis which cannot be immediately dismissed. At the time at which the humanities were conceived as a separate area of study, the technical aspects of our culture were not difficult to understand and required for their understanding little formal education. Even though windmills and looms may have altered our culture, how they operated was not difficult to comprehend. Thus, the humanities at such a time could with little error be characterized as constituting the soul of our culture because an understanding of curent technology could be assumed.

From Marx to McLuhan we have testimony of how technology affects culture. Over the same stretch of time we have the relatively unchanged humanities, as befits their characterization as the soul of our culture and as required by their methodological gap. But what in the earlier arbitrary classification was formally omitted and not recognized as essential has grown to be a crippling omission. What constituted a small error in defining the soul has assumed mammoth proportions.

Thus, there is a possibilty that the crisis in the humanities is not that society has failed to increase, *pari passu,* the resources devoted to them but that they have incorrectly defined the soul of our culture so that they now have relatively less to tell us about the total cultural setting in which man finds himself. That the goals of the humanities encompass some which are perhaps more vital to our survival than any of those of the natural sciences may only mean that the humanities' relatively decreased ability to further their goals is the greatest tragedy of all.

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can be and is used as a curriculum and course content guide in the absence of any other—relevance being treated primarily as a function of juxtaposition. A third and more basic category of relevance, however, is relevance to the goals of the humanities. In answering questions stemming from this third category of relevance the humanities are relatively ineffectual.

[37] The *attempt* by the student to secure knowledge or understanding is itself an end in the humanities to an extent perhaps unmatched in other areas of learning. In the humanities, the goal of adding to man's store of knowledge is not preeminent. Thus, if some scholar were to possess what would be immediately and indisputably recognized by all as *the* interpretation of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and made it known, it is not clear that there would be a net advance of the humanities if he were to do so. By foreclosing alternatives, knowledge may have been advanced but also foreclosed are the benefits accruing from further attempts to get incorrect answers. In this sense, advances in knowledge in the humanities impoverishes them.